



NEWS

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Office of the Secretary

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Secretary Norton Approves \$109 Million in Southern Nevada Projects

\$45 Million earmarked for acquisition of environmentally sensitive lands

Washington -- Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton today announced approval for the Bureau of Land Management to use \$109 million in funds raised by the sale of public land in the Las Vegas Valley under the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act. The projects to be funded include further development of the Clark County Wetlands Park, the Las Vegas Preserve, and construction of miles of trails within the Las Vegas Valley.

Under the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act passed in 1998, BLM is authorized to sell land identified for disposal in the Las Vegas Valley, and to use the proceeds to acquire land and pay for projects that benefit the people of Nevada.

“The Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act of 1998, is a landmark law that benefits the state school trust fund and the regional water authority,” Secretary Norton said. “It provides for the protection of environmentally sensitive lands and multispecies habitat, improves recreation opportunities, and allows development to occur where appropriate.”

Nearly \$40 million of the \$109 million announced today will be handed over to the local governments in Clark County to be used for the development of parks, trails and natural areas in and around Las Vegas. The projects to be funded include further development of the Clark County Wetlands Park, and the Las Vegas Preserve, as well as construction of miles of trails within the Las Vegas Valley.

Secretary Norton praised the Nevada congressional delegation for their support and particularly the work of Sen. John Ensign, the original sponsor of SNPLMA. “Senator Ensign worked closely with us to ensure that funds raised by the sale of land under the Act, are used to fund environmentally sensitive projects in Clark County,” Norton said.

Another \$24 million will be on capital improvements at the most popular federally-managed destinations for outdoor recreation in Clark County. There will be improvements to picnic areas, campgrounds, trailheads, and other visitor facilities at Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area, and the Desert National Wildlife Refuge.

The balance of the approved funds (\$45 million) will be used to acquire environmentally sensitive land in Clark County, including private in-holdings in the Spring Mountains National Recreation Area and the Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. Secretary Norton also approved purchase of the Ballardini and McCarran Ranches in Washoe and Storey Counties.

“The Secretary approved 90 percent of the recommendation,” said BLM State Director Bob Abbey. “She asked that we take one more look at the properties recommended for acquisition that lie in Clark County, since that is where land sales occur.”

Accordingly, the BLM will accept nominations for additional land acquisitions within Clark County for the next 30 days. Following the additional 30-day comment period, the federal agency representatives will review any new nominations and develop a recommendation for the Secretary.

The Act allows for the sale of land within the Las Vegas Valley, with the proceeds benefitting Nevada residents and visitors. Five percent of the proceeds benefit Nevada schools, 10 percent go to the Southern Nevada Water Authority for infrastructure to support development, and the balance (85 percent) go to a special fund for use by the Secretary of the Interior. The Secretary may use the funds for land acquisitions in Nevada, capital improvement on federal land in Clark County, development of parks, trails and natural areas in Clark County in partnership with local governments, and for development of a multi-species habitat conservation plan for Clark County. To date, land sales have generated more than \$155 million.

Each year, the BLM facilitates a nomination and approval process for potential project and land acquisitions. Representatives of the state, local governments, rural Nevada, and the federal agencies work together to develop a recommendation for the Secretary for how the funds might be spent.

The funds announced today are the third round of expenditures authorized under the Act. The second round was announced July 2001 for \$45.2 million. Since the law was enacted, BLM has held six competitive land auctions in Las Vegas and five on the Internet. The May 2001 auction resulted in \$58.4 million in sales, with a 1,700-acre North Las Vegas parcel going for \$47.2 million.

A complete list of projects and land acquisitions can be found on the BLM Nevada Internet web site by clicking on “Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act” at www.nv.blm.gov.

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